

MEPKIN ABBEY

NATURE'S SPIRITUAL SIDE

by Joy Stenner



We need quiet to truly listen. But in today's harried world, it is hard to find coves of silence. About 20 miles upstream from Charleston, nestled on the spectacular Cooper River, is **Mepkin Abbey**, a place where visitors can shut out the noise and find nature's spiritual side.

Mepkin has long been a retreat for those seeking external beauty and internal reorganization. Once a Colonial rice plantation, today's Mepkin is a place of solemn prayer and hard work for 30 Trappist monks who call it home. Going against the grain of modern life, these monks rise at 3 am to spend the day's breaking hours in silent meditation and sung prayer. They meet seven more times for prayer before silence resumes at 8 pm.

Today, there are 700 Christian monasteries around the world, 100 of which are located in the United States. Seventeen of these are Trappist. Mepkin Abbey was established in 1949 following the gracious donation of this property by Henry R. Luce, philanthropist and founder of *Time Magazine*, and his wife, The Honorable Clare Boothe Luce.

Trappist monasteries are sustained by the hands of their inhabitants. When not in prayer, the monks of Mepkin Abbey spend their hours running a thriving chicken farm that produces nine million eggs per year. These eggs and organic gardening compost are available for sale at the Abbey's gift shop in the Reception Center. The Reception Center is the starting point for public tours, which include a history of Mepkin and an overview of monastic life provided by one of the monks.

Folks calling on Mepkin Abbey may choose to stay only a few hours to tour the church's award-winning architecture and sweeping gardens, or they may stay longer as retreatants to take part in the monks' prayer and work. In 2002, visitors will be able to tour the new Clare Boothe Luce Library and Conference Center, which will hold a collection of rare theological and spiritual works. Also in 2002, the monks will announce the development of a botanical garden with cultural interpretive centers.

Travelers come to Mepkin Abbey to see nature's offerings and to listen in silence. They even come to quell curiosities about the myths and mysteries of monks. Regardless of the duration of their stay, visitors leave Mepkin's 3,000 acres of ancient live oaks and draping Spanish moss with a more peaceful spirit than when they arrived.

If you go...

Mepkin Abbey

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